

# theater

## Bay of Pigs revisited in new drama

"THE INTERROGATION OF HAVANA," a play by Hans Magnus Enzensberger, translated by Peter Mayer, based upon the public hearings held with prisoners captured during the Bay of Pigs Invasion, directed by Louis Criss, produced by the Chelsea Theater Center, Brooklyn Academy of Music, N.Y.C., N.Y.

The really creative energies of any historical moment are not necessarily divided equally among the arts.

At various times, the novel, painting, poetry, "cultivated" music, theater and the popular song become focuses which seem most aptly suited to the development of new consciousness. In the past decade in this country it is obvious that film, popular song and, to a lesser extent, poetry, have been the consistently energetic forms while the novel, painting and the theater seem to have become increasingly irrelevant as the arenas in which new ideology battles old. This is not to say that everything produced in the more "vital" forms is significant or that there have not been individual novels or plays which were an important part of the changing cultural patterns of recent years.

Clearly the American theater has come upon hard days. With the exception of "Hair," it is hard to think of an American play of recent memory which made any significant impact on general awareness and it can be reasonably argued that this was largely the result of tapping the energies unleashed by contemporary rock music. The world that Ibsen built doesn't have much substance nowadays with the commercial stage playing almost exclusively to nostalgia, outmoded consciousness and middle class anxiety—while the "non-commercial" theater becomes irretrievably more precious and elitist in its concerns.

On some other occasion it may prove interesting to explore the particular social reasons for this development—beyond the obvious factors of competition from television and film. At the moment, however, I simply want to call to your attention one of the few theatrical productions I have encountered recently which still retains some power to evoke emotions and challenge intellectual predispositions.

### "Interrogation in Havana"

The play is Hans Magnus Enzensberger's "The Interrogation of Havana," produced in unpretentious fashion by the Chelsea Theater Center at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in New York. Not surprisingly, it is one of those "theater of fact" undertakings which seem to have a better chance of being accepted by our tortured credibilities than other forms of "political" theater these days.

The play is based upon and derives completely from the interrogation of prisoners captured during the Bay of Pigs Invasion in 1961. The actual circumstances of the original event were dramatic enough. Forty of the captured prisoners were publicly questioned before assembled journalists and others by a panel of revolutionaries, among them Carlos Rafael Rodriguez, one of the few old-line Cuban Communists to join Fidel in the Sierra Maestra and a leading theoretician of the revolution, Carlos Franqui, respected liberal journalist (Franqui has since become alienated from the revolution and was one of the prime movers in the exploitation of the Padilla affair), and Raul Valdes Vivo, a commandante during the rebellion and representing the revolutionary armed forces.

Enzensberger has excerpted portions of the testimony of nine of the prisoners and fashioned the whole into a work of telling impact and revealing insight. Detailed authenticity is not necessarily the most crucial of theatrical qualities, but in this case I can vouch for the general accuracy of the production since, in 1967, I witnessed an almost identical event in Havana.

### "Pathetic tools"

Several Cuban CIA agents had been captured. This particular group actually had an assassination plan directed against Fidel Castro and other leaders of the Cuban government, plus schemes for the sabotage of sugar mills and steel factories. They were apprehended during the course of an international conference I was attending and all of us were invited to the public interrogation of the prisoners. The experience was intensely moving because it showed just how pitiful these pathetic tools of American imperialism really were while providing us with an unforgettable demonstration of revolutionary determination and human compassion which has always been a central characteristic of the Cuban revolution.

Seeing "Interrogation of Havana" brought that incident back to mind, of course, and once again I was struck by the confidence of this revolution in the ideological resources of the people. The impact of the play rests primarily in the testimony of the witnesses. Some are former land-holders and businessmen, a couple were "revolutionaries" who turned against the cause, one is a priest who went along on the invasion as a "spiritual advisor to the Catholic boys," another is one of those weasly little opportunists who are always caught up in such enterprises while still another joined the attack because of "philosophical principles." At the end, we confront a leader of the invasion, Ramon Calvino, one of the most notorious of the torturers and murderers who comprised Batista's political police.

Almost without exception, each of the prisoners emerge as a credible personage. The actors portraying the prisoners have each worked out a carefully conceived human being whose testimony seems to flow out of the character of each.

### A definition of morality

Unfortunately, the representatives of the revolutionary government do not fare as well at the hands of their portrayers—telling us, perhaps, something about the ability of American actors to understand the inner turmoils of those still struggling against socialism and their inability to fathom the characters and motivations of those for whom the revolution has become the definition of morality.

The failure is understandable. What is there, after all, in the experience of any American actor to prepare him for a revolutionary commandante? Not so surprisingly, he will see such a man as the incarnation of a certain "universal" military mentality, rigid, mindless, boorish—employing revolutionary ideology as the rhetorical mask behind which the inevitable authoritarian personality lurks.